

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 21593

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR VN VS CB LA ASEAN FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH VIEWS CONCERNING INDOCHINA

SUMMARY: DURING A PERIODIC TOUR D'HORIZON, QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ASIA DOPFFER SPOKE PARTICULARLY OF THE EVOLUTION IN SRV POLICY WHICH HAD RESULTED IN THE SUCCESSFUL PHAN HIEN TRIP TO SEA. HE ALSO SPOKE OF A RECENT AGREEMENT WITH THE SRV TO PROVIDE FOR PROJECTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM THE UNUSED 1973 AND 1974 AID GRANTED TO THE GVN. THE PRIVATE FRENCH MISSIONS TO VIETNAM CONCERNING PROPERTY IN SOUTH VIETNAM HAVE HAD MIXED SUCCESS; THE FRENCH EXPECT A CLEARER PROGRAM WITHIN A FEW MONTHS WHEN THE SRV WORKS OUT AN INVESTMENT CODE FOR JOINT VENTURES. THE FRENCH RECENTLY LOWERED THE BOOM ON THE DEMOCRATIC CAMBODIAN MISSION HERE, DEPRIVING IT OF ALL DIPLOMATIC STATUS AND PRIVILEGES. THE FRENCH DO NOT EXPECT THE CAMBODIANS TO BE VERY ACTIVE AT THE COLOMBO NON-ALIGNED
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CONFERENCE. THE FRENCH SEE AN INCREASINGLY INDEPENDENT

SOVIET ROLE IN LAOS. END SUMMARY.

1. SRV FOREIGN RELATIONS. DOPFFER THOUGHT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVENT IN RECENT WEEKS WAS THE PHAN HIEN TRIP TO THE OTHER COUNTRIES IN SEA. THE GOF THOUGHT THAT THE TRIP HAD BEEN A GREAT SUCCESS EVERYWHERE IN SHOWING THAT THE SRV HAD PEACEFUL INTENTIONS CONCERNING ITS NEIGHBORS AND IN PERMITTING AN IMPROVEMENT IN BILATERAL RELATIONS EVEN WITH THOSE COUNTRIES WITH WHICH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WERE NOT ESTABLISHED. THE THAI VISIT TO HANOI SHOULD PERMIT A SIMILAR ACCOMPLISHMENT WITH THAILAND. IN ADDITION, PHAN HIEN'S TRIP SHOWED THE EVOLUTION IN HANOI OF A MORE FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD ASEAN AS AN ORGANIZATION. IN SINGAPORE PHAN HIEN SAID THAT THE SRV CONSIDERED THAT ASEAN WAS NOW A "NEUTRAL" ORGANIZATION, AND ONE REPORT FROM JAKARTA INDICATED HE MAY HAVE SAID THERE THAT IT IS "TRULY NEUTRAL." DOPFFER SAID THAT THE GOF THOUGHT THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO TROUBLE FOR THE THAI IN ARRIVING AT AN AGREEMENT ON RELATIONS SINCE THE FOUR PRINCIPLES ANNOUNCED BY FOREIGN MINISTER TRINH (AND INCORPORATED IN THE SRV/PHILIPPINE COMMUNIQUE) SHOULD SATISFY THAI CONCERNS ABOUT VIETNAMESE ASSISTANCE TO INSURGENCY IN THAILAND--WHICH THE THAI WOULD BE WELL ADVISED NOT TO REFER TO SPECIFICALLY. IN SUM, THE FRENCH THOUGHT THAT THE TRIP SHOWED THAT THE SRV HAD MADE A BASIC AND FAVORABLE CHANGE IN ITS APPRAISAL OF FOREIGN RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS AND HAD COME FORTH WITH A MORE PRAGMATIC AND HELPFUL FOREIGN POLICY. THE FRENCH RECOGNIZED THAT IN PART THIS "NEW POLICY" MAY BE BASICALLY TACTICAL, USEFUL JUST BEFORE THE UNGA AND THE NON-ALIGNED MEETING, BUT THEY THOUGHT IT ALSO SHOWED HANOI'S DESIRE TO COMPETE WITH PEKING IN A PACIFIC WAY. DOPFFER AGREED, HOWEVER, THAT THE ASEAN NATIONS WOULD PROBABLY ALL MAINTAIN SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE DEFINITIONS WHICH HANOI ATTACHES TO SOME OF THE WORDS IN THE COMMUNIQUE AND WILL EXAMINE HANOI'S ACTIONS, NOT JUST ITS WORDS, IN DETERMINING WHETHER THE SRV IS MAINTAINING A "TWO TRACK" POLICY OF ASSISTING "LIBERATION MOVEMENTS" AS WELL AS HAVING GOOD GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS. DOPFFER SAID FINALLY THAT THE USG AND GOF BOTH SAW THE SAME

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ELEMENTS IN THE VIETNAMESE "NEW LOOK," BUT THAT THE US WAS MORE SCEPTICAL, AS WAS SINGAPORE, AND THE FRENCH WERE MORE EUPHORIC. (COMMENT: DOPFFER DID NOT RAISE, AS HAVE OTHERS, A POSSIBLE SOVIET ROLE IN PERSUADING HANOI TO ADOPT THE NEW APPROACH; THE IMPLICATION WAS THAT SINCE HANOI WAS FOLLOWING PARIS' LINE, PERHAPS THE INFLUENCE HAD BEEN FRENCH.)

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2. FRANCO/VIETNAMESE ECONOMIC RELATIONS. THE GOF RECENTLY ARRIVED AT AN AGREEMENT WITH THE SRV EMBASSY TO PERMIT THE SRV TO USE FOR NEW PROJECTS IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF VIETNAM THE UNUSED CREDITS WHICH WERE LEFT OVER FROM THE 1973 AND 1974 PROTOCOLS SIGNED WITH THE GVN. THE GOF HAD WAITED SIX MONTHS TO SEE HOW RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM EVOLVED AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE GENERAL GOF/DRV AGREEMENTS IN NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1975 AND HAD DECIDED THAT RELATIONS WERE PROCEEDING SMOOTHLY, PARTICULARLY AS CONCERNS THE SOUTH. THEY THEREFORE DECIDED TO FIND SOME WAY TO GET AROUND THE PROBLEM OF THEIR REQUIREMENT THAT THE VIETNAMESE ACCEPT AS VALID OBLIGATIONS THAT PART OF THE LOANS GIVEN TO THE GVN IF THEY EXPECTED TO DRAW ON THE UNUSED LOANS. DOPFFER DID NOT MAKE THE FORMULA

CLEAR, BUT SAID IT WAS MORE COMPLICATED THAN SIMPLE
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FRENCH CANCELLATION OF THE LOANS--HE THOUGHT THE MINISTRY
OF FINANCE MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN IT TO OUR FINANCIAL
ATTACHE--IMPLYING HE MIGHT NOT UNDERSTAND IT.

3. FRENCH INVESTMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. DOPFFER
REFERRED AGAIN TO THE TWELVE PRIVATE MISSIONS WHICH
WERE SENT TO VIETNAM IN APRIL AND MAY 1976 TO DISCUSS
THE FRENCH INVESTMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THE VARIOUS
DELEGATIONS WERE TREATED DIFFERENTLY AND HAD VARYING
SUCCESS. THE PRINCIPAL CRITERION USED BY THE SRV WAS
APPARENTLY WHETHER FRENCH INVOLVEMENT WAS STILL NECES-
SARY AND WHETHER THE ENTERPRISE WAS CONSIDERED USEFUL
FOR VIETNAM. THE VIETNAMESE OBVIOUSLY DID NOT NEED ANY
FRENCH ASSISTANCE FOR RUNNING THE TOBACCO COMPANY, BUT
THEY WERE INTERESTED IN FRENCH HELP IN ENGINEERING PRO-
JECTS AND PHARMACEUTICALS. THE VIETNAMESE REFUSED TO
DISCUSS THE RUBBER PLANTATIONS, AND THE DEPTH OF THEIR
FEELING AGAINST THEM WAS UNDERLINED BY REFERENCES TO A
TRUONG CHINH ARTICLE OF BEFORE WORLD WAR II ABOUT THE
SACRIFICE OF VIETNAMESE LIVES THEY ENTAILED. HOWEVER,
THE VIETNAMESE HAD APPARENTLY CONTACTED SOME OF THE IN-
DIVIDUAL FRENCHMEN PREVIOUSLY INVOLVED WITH THE PLANTA-
TIONS, WHICH SHOWED THEY MIGHT EVENTUALLY BE PREPARED
FOR SOME FRENCH ROLE EVEN IN THIS AREA. DOPFFER NOTED
THAT UNDER THE PROGRAM ENVISAGED, THERE WOULD BE A NUM-
BER OF FRENCH IN VIETNAM, INCLUDING IN THE PROVINCES.
HE SAID THEY HAD A NUMBER THERE EVEN NOW, AND THEY HAD
NO PROBLEMS IF THEY BEHAVED "CORRECTLY." THE FRENCH
HAD INSISTED ON THE SRV'S WORKING OUT A CODE FOR FOR-
EIGN INVESTMENTS IN VIETNAM WHICH WOULD COVER MIXED
COMPANIES WITH 51 PERCENT VIETNAMESE OWNERSHIP AND 49
PERCENT FRENCH OWNERSHIP. THE GOF THOUGHT THE SRV
WOULD HAVE THIS CODE READY IN A FEW MONTHS, AND THE
FRENCH COULD THEN DISCUSS INDEMNIFICATION FOR PROPERTY
WHICH THE VIETNAMESE DID NOT WISH TO BECOME JOINT VEN-
TURES AND ALSO THE PROCEDURES FOR VIETNAMESE ACQUISITION
OF THEIR PART OF THE INVESTMENT. THE FRENCH THOUGHT
THAT IN THIS ECONOMIC FIELD ALSO THE VIETNAMESE WERE
SHOWING A PRAGMATIC APPROACH, WHICH WAS PROMISING.

4. FRENCH RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA. DOPFFER SAID THAT
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THE RECENT CHANGES IN FRANCO/CAMBODIAN RELATIONS WERE VERY CONFIDENTIAL; DOPFFER AND THE INFORMATION SHOULD BE COMPLETELY PROTECTED. THE FRENCH RECENTLY INFORMED THE DEMOCRATIC CAMBODIANS THAT THE GOF HAD BEEN VERY PATIENT FOR OVER A YEAR, AND SINCE THE DC GOVERNMENT WAS NOT PREPARED TO BEHAVE LIKE A NORMAL GOVERNMENT AND TALK WITH THE GOF, THE FRENCH WERE WITHDRAWING FROM DC PERSONNEL ALL OF THE ELEMENTS OF THEIR PREVIOUS DIPLOMATIC STATUS. THEY WOULD NO LONGER HAVE DIPLOMATIC CARDS, DIPLOMATIC AUTOMOBILE PLATES, ETC. IF THEY TRIED TO FLY THE CAMBODIAN FLAG, THE POLICE WOULD TAKE IT DOWN. THE CAMBODIANS WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO REMAIN IN THEIR CURRENT OFFICE' IN ADDITION THEY TOLD THE CAMBODIANS THAT THE GOF RESCINDED THE APRIL 12, 1975, RECOGNITION OF THE NEW CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT; WHEN THE CAMBODIANS WISHED TO HAVE RELATIONS WITH FRANCE, THEY WOULD HAVE TO PROPOSE THEM AND THE GOF WOULD THEN STUDY THE PROPOSAL. COMMENT: SOME FRENCH HOPE THAT FRENCH PRESSURE MAY BRING THE DC GOVERNMENT TO CONTACTS WITH THE GOF (PARTICULARLY IF THEY NEED STAGING ASSISTANCE THROUGH FRANCE FOR THEIR UNGA DELEGATION). HOWEVER, DOPFFER IMPLIED THAT THE SHARP FRENCH ACTION WAS DICTATED BY FRENCH RESENTMENT OVER DC BEHAVIOR, AND THEY HAD LITTLE HOPE THAT UNDER THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT THERE WOULD BE ANY IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS.

5. CAMBODIAN DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY. THE FRENCH HAD

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RECEIVED NO WORD FROM THEIR EMBASSY IN ALGIERS ABOUT THE ACTIVITY OF THE CAMBODIAN OBSERVER THION PRASITH AT THE NON ALIGNED PREPARATORY MEETING. DOPFFER THOUGHT THE CAMBODIANS WOULD HAVE A MORE IMPORTANT DELEGATION AT THE COLOMBO MEETING, BUT IT WOULD PROBABLY STILL BE RATHER INACTIVE SINCE IT WOULD NOT WISH TO HAVE TO REPLY TO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HEALTH OF THE OLD NON-ALIGNED SIHANOUK.

6. SOVIET/VIETNAMESE DIFFERENCES OVER LAOS. THE FRENCH HAD REPORTS FROM VIENTIANE THAT THE SOVIETS AND THE VIETNAMESE WERE NO LONGER SEEING QUITE SO EYE TO EYE OVER LAOS. DOPFFER THOUGHT THAT THE SOVIETS WERE PLAYING A RATHER INDEPENDENT GAME IN THEIR AID TO LAOS-- AND THE LAO WERE MORE ANXIOUS TO RECEIVE IT THAN WERE THE VIETNAMESE TO HAVE THEM DO SO. IN ADDITION, THE
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LAO ACCEPTANCE OF THE SOVIET ASIAN SECURITY FORMULA WAS OBVIOUSLY NOT FAVORED BY HANOI. DOPFFER SAID THAT THE REPORTS WERE NOT YET VERY CLEAR, BUT THEY GAVE INDICATIONS OF SOMEWHAT MORE PLAY IN THE THREE-WAY RELATIONSHIP THAN THEY HAD THOUGHT PREVIOUSLY WHEN THE SOVIET ROLE IN LAOS APPEARED TO BE JUST WHAT HANOI ASKED FOR AND NO MORE. THE FRENCH THOUGHT THAT THE SRV STILL CONTROLLED THE LAO PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN ALL IMPORTANT MATTERS, BUT THE SITUATION WAS BECOMING JUST A BIT LESS SIMPLISTIC.
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